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# Prophetic Hermeneutics in the Hebrew Bible and Mesopotamia

‘That’s the point. Most of the time she comes up with such an oblique reference that you can’t work it out until it’s gone past, and then it all slots into place.’

Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman, *Good Omens* (London: Corgi, 1991), 220.

## Abstract

This paper looks at how prophetic texts construct meaning, with a focus on the overlap between ancient Near Eastern hermeneutic traditions in general and the way divination was understood to function. After a discussion of the divinatory character of prophecy, the paper analyses assonance and word-play in combination with sign-acts and visions, and how each of them conveys a specific message. Other topics include the development of prophecy towards absolute determinacy in Deuteronomy, and the phenomenon that prophetic texts begin to be understood as carrying mantic meaning not just to the original audience(s) but also to later readerships (e.g. Pesharim at Qumran).

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

How do prophetic—and other divinatory—texts construe the way they work and interface with their addressees?<sup>2</sup> And how do prophetic texts themselves

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Hugh Williamson, Martti Nissinen and Paul Joyce for discussing the ideas in this paper with me over the past years. I would also like to thank Eckart Frahm and Konrad Schmid for commenting on earlier drafts. Unless otherwise noted, all translations and all mistakes in this paper are my own.

<sup>2</sup> I follow the understanding of prophecy as arrived at in Jonathan Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: A Philological and Sociological Comparison* (CHANE 56; Leiden: Brill), 7-11; Manfred Weippert, “Aspekte israelitischer Prophetie im Lichte verwandter Erscheinungen des Alten Orients,” in *Ad bene et fideliter seminandum: Festgabe für Karlheinz Deller zum 21. Februar 1987* (ed. by U. Magen, and G. Mauer; AOAT 220; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1988), 287-319; Lester L. Grabbe, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages: A Socio-Historical Study of Religious Specialists in Ancient Israel* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1995), 150-151; Martti Nissinen, “What is Prophecy? An Ancient Near Eastern Perspective,” in *Inspired*

construct meaning? In other words: what is the point and purpose of prophecy, and how does a prophet go about achieving their goal?

Scholars debate whether prophets, particularly those in the Hebrew Bible, predict the future or point their finger at specific current grievances, often understood to be of a religious nature or regarding social justice. The terminology often associated with this distinction is that between ‘foretelling’ and ‘forthtelling’. Recently this debate has been answered by an almost Hegelian synthesis in which aspects of foretelling and forthtelling are said to be present in all ancient Near Eastern prophecy including prophetic texts in the Hebrew Bible:<sup>3</sup> the potential future is announced in order to prevent it, by influencing people to make decisions that are aimed at achieving that potentially negative future. If the understanding of prophecy as a ‘subdiscipline’ of divination, as argued by Nissinen, Grabbe, myself and others is correct, then the function of prophecy was presumably to provide decision-makers with the information that they needed in order to

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*Speech: Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honour of Herbert B. Huffmon* (ed. by J. Kaltner, and L. Stulman; JSOTSup 378; London: T & T Clark, 2004), 17-37; Idem, “Prophecy and Omen Divination: Two Sides of the Same Coin,” in *Divination and Interpretation of Signs in the Ancient World* (ed. A. Annus; OIS 6; Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010), 341-351. For a different and insightful interpretation of the relationship between prophecy and (technical) divination, see Seth Sanders’ “Why Prophecy Became a Genre: First Isaiah as an Instance of Ancient Near Eastern Text-Building” (to be published in a future *HeBAI* volume), as well as his understanding of prophecy as encompassing what I would refer to as revelation and / or divine inspiration. Thus, he includes the literary work *Erra* in his understanding of prophecy.

<sup>3</sup> Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, “Prophecy as a Way of Cancelling Prophecy – the Strategic Uses of Foreknowledge,” *ZAW* 117 (2005): 329-50; Matthijs J. de Jong, “Biblical Prophecy - A Scribal Enterprise: The Old Testament Prophecy of Unconditional Judgement Considered as a Literary Phenomenon,” *VT* 61 (2011): 39-70; Werner H. Schmidt, “Einsicht als Ziel prophetischer Verkündigung,” in *Ich bewirke das Heil und erschaffe das Unheil (Jesaja 45,7): Studien zur Botschaft der Propheten: Festschrift für Lothar Ruppert zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. F. Diedrich and B. Willmes; FB 88; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1998), 377-396. Against Reinhard G. Kratz, “Das Neue in der Prophetie des Alten Testaments,” in *Prophetie in Israel: Beiträge des Symposiums “Das Alte Testament und die Kultur der Moderne” anlässlich des 100. Geburtstags Gerhard von Rads (1901-1971) Heidelberg, 18.-21. Oktober 2001* (ed. I. Fischer, K. Schmid and H.G.M. Williamson; Münster: Lit Verlag, 2003), 18-19, these authors, and I share their view, assume that historically, prophets would have uttered oracles of salvation as well as of doom.

make their decisions, akin to the role of other advisors.<sup>4</sup>

Many scholars hold that prophetic texts—and other texts that originally may not have been prophetic—were understood by later readers as announcing something specific to them in their own contexts.<sup>5</sup> This way of reading—and adding to—ancient texts has created most of the prophetic books in the Hebrew Bible as we know it today.<sup>6</sup> At some point prophetic interpretation of existing literature began to be written in separate literary works known from Qumran as Pesharim rather than as an integral part of the

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<sup>4</sup> A recent overview of ancient Near Eastern (technical) divination can be found in Stefan Maul, *Die Wahrsagekunst im Alten Orient: Zeichen des Himmels und der Erde* (Historische Bibliothek der Gerda Henkel Stiftung; München: C. H. Beck, 2013) and Idem, “Divination Culture and the Handling of the Future,” *The Babylonian World* (ed. G. Leick; Routledge Worlds; New York / London: Routledge, 2007), 361-372. On the question of the relation between prophecy / intuitive divination and (technical) divination, see, e.g., Jonathan Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: A Philological and Sociological Comparison* (CHANE 56; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 7-11; Lester L. Grabbe, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages: A Socio-Historical Study of Religious Specialists in Ancient Israel* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1995), 150-151; Martti Nissinen, “Prophecy and Omen Divination: Two Sides of the Same Coin,” in *Divination and Interpretation of Signs in the Ancient World* (ed. A. Annus; OIS 6; Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010), 341-351. For a different and insightful interpretation of the relationship between prophecy and (technical) divination, see Seth Sanders’ “XYZ” in which he compares the essentially scribal art of divination with the initially oral art of prophecy, which in biblical form is known to us mostly as a scribal art as well.

<sup>5</sup> In the recent discussion of prophetic literature in the Second Temple period this is a clearly discernible trend. For this see already John Barton, *Oracles of God: Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel after the Exile* (Society of Old Testament Studies Monograph Series 6; London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1986); regarding the more recent debate see, e.g., the essays in M. H. Floyd and R. D. Haak, eds. *Prophets, Prophecy, and Prophetic Texts in Second Temple Judaism* (LHBOTS 427; New York and London: T&T Clark, 2006), de Jong, “Scribal Enterprise” (see n. 3) and Kratz, “Das Neue” (see n. 3), 19-22. Importantly, Konrad Schmid, “Prognosen und Postgnosen in der biblischen Prophetie,” *EvT* 74 (2014): 462-476 argues that this does not mandate only later fulfilment of prophetic texts, but that oracles could be fulfilled more than once (p.470).

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Konrad Schmid, “Prognosen” (see n. 5); Kratz, “Das Neue” (see n. 3), regards this as the quintessentially “new” of biblical prophecy. See similarly Jonathan Stökl, “How Unique was Israelite Prophecy,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell History of Jews and Judaism* (ed. A. T. Levenson; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 53-69; Jörg Jeremias, “Das Proprium der alttestamentlichen Prophetie,” *TLZ* 119 (1994): 483-494; Indeed, in his response to Kratz, Hendrik Leene (“Das Neue in der Prophetie: Antwort an Reinhard G. Kratz,” in *Prophetie in Israel: Beiträge des Symposiums “Das Alte Testament und die Kultur der Moderne” anlässlich des 100. Geburtstags Gerhard von Rads (1901-1971)* Heidelberg, 18.-21. Oktober 2001 [ed. I. Fischer, K. Schmid and H.G.M. Williamson; Münster: Lit Verlag, 2003], 23-28) suggests that Deutero-Isaiah regarded the entire previous salvation history as divine proof for his own existence, and translates Isa 42:9 with “the past, it has come to pass.”

biblical texts themselves.<sup>7</sup> Structurally, the Pesharim are similar to ancient Near Eastern commentary literature in that they quote a passage or a term from the text they are interpreting before then expounding on its meaning, often preceded by the term פִּשְׁרוֹ ('its meaning [is]:').<sup>8</sup> In section 5 I will discuss some of the consequences of the development of peshar literature as well as the emergence of the figure of an "interpreting angel." The previous two sections will focus on etymology-based and key-word associations (3) in prophetic text and the use of sign-acts and imagery (4). Before these topics are broached, however, it is necessary to discuss further how, according to the available evidence, prophetic texts define their role, especially with regard to the notion of the 'past'.

## 2. Prophecy among the Divinatory Arts

As stated above, I follow Martti Nissinen's lead in understanding prophecy as one of the divinatory arts.<sup>9</sup> Its initial purpose is to allow somebody who needs to make a decision to have some insight into the consequences of this decision. While a prophetic oracle may explicitly talk about the future this future is a conditional future.<sup>10</sup> Only if certain preconditions are being kept is the announced future going to become the real future. In the case of the surviving Mesopotamian prophetic texts, the decision-maker is usually the king, and the gods use human beings—e.g., prophets—in order to

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<sup>7</sup> On prophecy in Qumran see, e.g., Alex P. Jassen, *Mediating the Divine: Prophecy and Revelation in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Second Temple Judaism* (STDJ 68; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007); Alex P. Jassen, "Prophets and Prophecy in the Qumran Community," *AJS Review* 32 (2008): 299-334.

<sup>8</sup> Alex P. Jassen, "The Pesharim and the Rise of Commentary in Early Jewish Scriptural Interpretation," *DSD* 19 (2012): 363-398; Uri Gabbay, "Akkadian Commentaries from Ancient Mesopotamia and Their Relation to Early Hebrew Exegesis," *DSD* 19 (2012): 267-312.

<sup>9</sup> See n. 4 above.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Maul, "Divination Culture" (see n. 4), 362-364. See also the contributions to Amar Annus (ed.), *Divination and Interpretation of Signs in the Ancient World* (OIS 6; Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2010).

communicate with him.<sup>11</sup> Like in prophetic texts from the Bible, the conditionality of the announcement is not usually stated explicitly.<sup>12</sup> If the understanding of prophecy as a sub-discipline of divination is correct it follows that prophetic announcements are likely to have been as conditional as those insights about the future gained from other divinatory arts.<sup>13</sup> That means that the predicted future was understood to come about in case a particular course of action was maintained. Thus, if the oracle question concerned going out of one's city to start a military campaign and the answer was that catastrophe would ensue, it followed that said catastrophe would not ensue if the king were not to go on campaign. Tiemeyer presents 1 Sam 23:9-13 as one of the examples. In this text David escapes capture at the hand of Saul by enquiring of God whether the inhabitants of the place where he is staying are going to hand him to Saul. Knowing this, David escapes, and technically speaking, the oracle is proven unfulfilled. Its function is to help David make a decision to escape.

As is well known, Deuteronomy 13 and 18 have a different approach to the issue. In Deuteronomy 18 Yhwh threatens those who pretend to be his prophets as well as those who speak in the name of other deities with death. Similarly, Deut 13:2-6 states that prophets who speak in favour of following other deities—even if their oracles come true—should not be followed, as that would constitute apostasy by acknowledging the power of other gods.<sup>14</sup> Deut 18:20-21 goes further than that. The rhetorical question how one is

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<sup>11</sup> Several of the cuneiform prophetic texts are addressed to other members of the royal family.

<sup>12</sup> For biblical prophetic texts see, e.g., Schmidt, "Einsicht als Ziel prophetischer Verkündigung" (see n. 3); Tiemeyer, "Cancelling Prophecy" (see n. 3).

<sup>13</sup> For prophecy as a form of divination, see Anne Marie Kitz, "Prophecy as Divination," *CBQ* 65 (2003): 22-42; JoAnn Scurlock, "Prophecy as a Form of Divination: Divination as a Form of Prophecy," in *Divination and Interpretation of Signs in the Ancient World* (ed. A. Annus; OIS 6; Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2010), 277-316; Nissinen, "Omen Divination" (see n. 4); Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (see n. 4), 7-11.

<sup>14</sup> This suggests that Deuteronomy 13 is aware of the thinking of Deut 18:20-21, that oracles that come true must be originally sent by a deity.

supposed to know whether an oracle originates with Yhwh or whether the speaker just claims that it does, is answered by effectively saying that all of Yhwh's oracles are fulfilled.<sup>15</sup>

If taken at face value—and it is hard to read Deuteronomy in any other way—this stands in direct conflict with the the book of Jonah which narrates how Jonah prophesies to the Ninevites that in 40 days Nineveh would be overthrown (Jonah 3:4). According to the story, the Ninevites, including their king, believed in God, repented and asked God for mercy—and Yhwh decides not to annihilate the city (Jonah 3:5-10).<sup>16</sup> Jonah is not amused by this development. If the author of the book of Jonah had accepted the definition outlined in Deut 18:20-21, Jonah would not have been a prophet. Perhaps, then, Jonah can be read as a critical commentary on Deuteronomy 13 and 18. Where Deuteronomy 13 and 18 emphasize the reliability of Yhwh's oracles, Jonah underlines his mercy as an overriding principle. Conversely, Deuteronomy 13 seems to be operating on the assumption that people read and interpret certain texts as Scripture. Jonah, on the other hand, appears to be unconcerned with such practices.

### **References to and Reliance on the Past**

The idea of reliance on past performance to suggest future reliability is, thus, a necessary, but not a sufficient precondition to Deuteronomy's understanding of the way that prophecy works. The same idea also appears in a number of Neo-Assyrian prophetic texts. SAA 9 1.4 and SAA 9 7 and possibly also SAA 9 3.3 contain references to a deity's actions or words in

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<sup>15</sup> As Schmid, "Prognosen" (see n. 5), 463-464 points out, 1 Kings 22 describes yet another situation: that of Yhwh sending false messages to his prophets, or as Schmid phrases it: "echte' Falschprophetie."

<sup>16</sup> The word for God in Jonah 3:5 is אֱלֹהִים. Jonah uses the tetragrammaton 21 times: Jonah 1:1, 3-4, 9-10, 14, 16-2:3; 2:7-8, 10-3:1; 3:3; 4:2-4, 6, 10.

the past.<sup>17</sup> All three contain oracles of support for the king, be it Aššurbanipal (SAA 9 7) or Esarhaddon (SAA 9 1.4 and SAA 9 3.3).<sup>18</sup>

SAA 9 7 contains an oracle of Mullissu, Aššur's wife, transmitted by the *raggintu* Mullissu-kabtat.<sup>19</sup> According to Manfred Weippert's interpretation of the text, lines 3-11 comprise an oracle that was originally announced to Aššurbanipal while he was still the crown prince and not yet the Assyrian king. This original oracle is included in SAA 9 7, a text written *after* he had come to the throne, in order to show that Mullissu's oracles can be trusted.<sup>20</sup> If this is correct, then SAA 9 7 relies on a hermeneutic that is similar to that of Deuteronomy's with regard to the reliability of prophecy based on the past.

After the first oracle, Mullissu-kabtat goes on to announce a second oracle (line 14): "Like Elam, I will finish the land of the Cimmerians".<sup>21</sup> Mullissu promises Aššurbanipal support in his conflict with the Cimmerians, pointing towards past support in the conflict with Elam. In this context, this could refer to two different aspects: either Mullissu is saying that she dealt with the Elamites and she will deal in the same way also with

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<sup>17</sup> For the issue of citation Manfred Weippert, "‘Das Frühere, siehe, ist eingetroffen’: Über Selbstzitate im altorientalischen Prophetenspruch," in *Oracles et prophéties dans l'Antiquité: Actes du colloque de Strasbourg, 15-17 juin 1995* (ed. J.-G. Heintz; Travaux du Centre de recherche sur le Proche-Orient et la Grèce antiques 15; Paris: De Boccard, 1997), 147-169 (recently republished in *Götterwort in Menschenmund: Studien zur Prophetie in Assyrien, Israel und Judah* [ed. M. Weippert; FRLANT 252; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014], 114-131) is still the central essay. As Weippert's focus is citation not reliance on events in the past he does not treat SAA 9 1.4.

<sup>18</sup> For the Neo-Assyrian prophetic texts see initially Martti Nissinen, *References to Prophecy in Neo-Assyrian Sources* (SAAS 7; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Corpus Project and the University of Helsinki, 1998); Simo Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies* (SAA 9; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1997). Most of the texts are available in English translation also in Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: With Contributions by C.L. Seow and Robert K. Ritner* (SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: SBL, 2003). A new edition is expected soon.

<sup>19</sup> On Mullissu-kabtat see Heather D. Baker, *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (eds S. Parpola, K. Radner and R. M. Whiting; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project University of Helsinki, 2001), 2: 766.

<sup>20</sup> Weippert, "Das Frühere" (see n. 17), 155-157.

<sup>21</sup> Line 14 reads: [m]ā šanītu laqbākka mā kī Elamtu māt Gimir agammar. The assonance between *Gimir* ('Cimmeria') and *gamāru* ('to finish') is evident. See on this further below.



the Cimmerians. Alternatively, her reference to the past goes further than that, and she is alluding to a(nother) previous oracle promising support against the Elamites.<sup>22</sup> In either case, SAA 9 7 alludes to the past and past oracles a number of times which suggests that it is arguing from past experience: Mullissu has been reliable in the past, she will be reliable in the future, as she does what she says.

SAA 9 3.3, a text from Esarhaddon's reign, also alludes to the past in a way that, as Weippert pointed out already almost 30 years ago, suggests understanding this text as a *Danklied* for previous support by the deity.<sup>23</sup> Due to the similarity with the accounts of Esarhaddon's struggles with his brothers during the succession Weippert regards this text as quoting or alluding to an oracle that likely refers back to those events.<sup>24</sup>

SAA 9 1.4 does not quote a previous oracle and is therefore not included in Weippert's study, but each section explicitly alludes to past action by the deity to whom the section is attributed, in order to suggest that this support is ongoing.<sup>25</sup> Thus, no new oracles are being supported with an argument that previous oracles have come true. Instead, the logic is simply

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<sup>22</sup> It is possible but unlikely that the target of the allusion is Mullissu's answer to Aššurbanipal's imprecatory prayers as narrated in Prism B v 46-49 (with the subsequent dream-vision to a *šabrû*, lines 52-76; || Prism C vi 45-78, see Nissinen, *References* (see n. 18), 43-61; Rykle Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals: Die Prismenklassen A, B, C = K, D, E, F, G, H, J und T sowie andere Inschriften* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996), 100-101, 225.

<sup>23</sup> Weippert, "Das Frühere" (see n. 17), 159-160. He refers, there, to the studies by Hans-Jürgen Zobel, "Das Gebet um Abwendung der Not und seine Erhöhung in den Klageliedern des Alten Testaments und in der Inschrift des Königs Zakir von Hamath," *VT* 21 (1971): 91-99; Jonas C. Greenfield, "The Zakir Inscription and the Danklied," in *Proceedings of the Fifth World Congress of Jewish Studies, the Hebrew University, Mount Scopus-Givat-Ram, Jerusalem, Jerusalem [sic], 3-11 August, 1969* (ed. Pinchas Peli; Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies and Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1972), 180-191; Karel van der Toorn, "L'oracle de victoire comme expression prophétique au Proche-Orient ancien," *RB* 94 (1987): 63-97 to define the genre. It is, indeed, not too different in structure from Aššurbanipal's Prism B v 46-76 (see above).

<sup>24</sup> Nin A i 41-81 = RINAP 4.1:41-81 (Erle Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680-669 BC)* [RINAP 4; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011], 12-14; Riekle [=Rykle] Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons, Königs von Assyrien* (AfO.Beihefte 9; Graz: Selbstverlag, 1956], 42-45).

<sup>25</sup> SAA 9 1.4 combines oracles that are attributed to Bēl, Ištar of Arbela and to Nabû.

that past behaviour of the deities is a good indicator that ‘the future will be like the past’ (line ii 37’).<sup>26</sup>

Recently Christof Hardmeier has proposed to understand the prophetic literature in the Hebrew Bible as “Geschichtsdivinatorik”.<sup>27</sup> He suggests that prophets started to use the past in the same way that other diviners would have used livers, dreams or arrows.<sup>28</sup> In order to achieve this, prophets had to start writing down their perception of the past so that it could become a repository of information much like law-collections would have been for legal experts and omen collections for technical diviners.<sup>29</sup> Hardmeier’s understanding goes further than the reinterpretation of oracles through the addition of further textual material at a later date. He also goes further than Kratz who argues that the act of writing down the prophetic oracle at the start of biblical prophetic literature is already a reinterpretation because this act makes the prophetic oracle available for a wider interpretation at a later date. For Hardmeier, the divinatory activity starts with the use of past events, as material to be interpreted just like a

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<sup>26</sup> The Akkadian text runs: *urkiūte lū kī pāniūte*.

<sup>27</sup> Hardmeier appears to follow the biblical image of technical divination as a cultural technique that flourished under Assyrian overlordship, as well as regarding it as being eradicated in Josiah’s reform. Due to the polemic nature of the biblical material on some forms of technical divination (but not others), I regard the biblical text as a unreliable source regarding the history of divination in ancient Israel and Judah. In addition, it seems to me that Hardmeier uncritically—and unnecessarily follows the negative evaluation of technical divination including necromancy put forward by biblical writers.

<sup>28</sup> See the various articles now conveniently brought together in Christof Hardmeier, *Geschichtsdivinatorik in der vorexilischen Schriftprophetie: Studien zu den Primärschriften in Jesaja, Zefanja und Jeremia* (Zürich: TVZ, 2013), in particular the two essays “Geschichtsdivinatorik und Zukunftsheuristik im schriftprophetischen Diskurs Jesaja 9,7-10,27: Eine exegetische sowie geschichts- und religionsphilosophisch reflektierte Studie zu den Jesajadiskursen in Jesaja 1-11” (pages 43-113) and “Zur schriftgestützten Expertentätigkeit Jeremias im Milieu der Jerusalemer Führungseliten (Jeremia 36): Prophetische Literaturbildung und die Neuinterpretation älterer Expertisen in Jeremia 21-23” (pages 209-242).

<sup>29</sup> The proximity of the genre of legal texts and omen literature with a protasis, usually starting with *šumma* (“if, when”) and an apodosis which spells out the consequences has been pointed out also by Maul, “Divination Culture” (see n. 4), 361, adding that medical texts also often follow this formal structure. Additionally, Hardmeier, “Expertentätigkeit” (see n. 28), 215-216 identifies the similarity in the usage of the term דבר in legal and prophetic discourses

hepatoscoper's liver. Like the hepatoscoper, Hardmeier's prophets, in particular Isaiah, Zephaniah and Jeremiah, would have had access to a literary compendium—in the prophets' case historical notes, written by them and their predecessors—by which they could “read” their omen.<sup>30</sup>

There can be little doubt that prophetic and non-prophetic texts that are preserved in the Bible were reinterpreted, at times through the composition of additional texts that are themselves now part of the biblical text. Schmid has recently summarized the effect of *Fortschreibung* in Jer 23:1-6: the oracle in vv. 1-2, which accuses the king for leading the population astray is reinterpreted by the addition of v. 3, which refocuses the oracle on Yhwh's salvific action—with the addition that the dispersal is no longer the kings' fault but Yhwh's (“I myself will gather the remnant of my flock from all the lands to which I have banished them”).<sup>31</sup> Verse 4, in turn refers back to the kings mentioned in vv. 1-2, and juxtaposes those bad kings with the new good kings to come. Verses 5-6, in turn, specify that these kings have to be Davidic.

Hardmeier's suggestion seems unlikely to me on several grounds. First of all, it relies on an ancient historical reality reconstructed at least in parts from the Biblical texts themselves which are then themselves interpreted in the light of the history reconstructed on the basis of the text.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> E.g., Hardmeier, “Geschichtsdivinatorik” (see n. 28), 50-51.

<sup>31</sup> See Schmid, “Prognosen” (see n. 5), 470-472. Indeed, Schmid argues that the oracle is referred to again in Jer 33: 14-16. For the wider phenomenon see, of course, Odil Hannes Steck, *Gott in der Zeit entdecken: Die Prophetenbücher des Alten Testaments als Vorbild für Theologie und Kirche* (BThSt 42; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2001), e.g. 167-178.

<sup>32</sup> This can be illustrated by pointing to Hardmeier's reconstruction of historical reality during the reigns of Hezekiah, Manasseh and Josiah. The biblical bias against Manasseh leads Hardmeier to view the monarch rather critically, while both Hezekiah and Josiah, whose actions likely had overwhelmingly negative implications for the general population in Judah, are getting a positive press in the Bible and in Hardmeier's reconstruction. Similarly, if Isa 9:7 refers specifically to Amos' and perhaps also Hosea's prophetic activity, rather than to prophetic activity more generally, the reference may be the result of editorial activity to create coherence between various texts in the canon (Hardmeier,

Additionally, the correlation drawn between the number of written documents in Classical Hebrew, which rises towards the end of the eighth century, is, in my view, a poor indicator for the spread of writing, particularly literary writing more generally.<sup>33</sup> Even if, as it is likely, the ability to read and write was increasing in the Judean population towards the end of the eighth and in the seventh century, this is not related as such to the ability of certain courtiers to read and write. Indeed, the state would have ensured their ability to read and write even before these skills became more widespread. And if the oracle in Lachish 3:19-21, השמר (“be careful”), is anything to go by, prophetic writing was far removed from being based on lengthy historical treatises.

In a move almost foreshadowing the recent perspective of *cultural memory* in reading biblical texts, Odil Hannes Steck stresses the importance not of historical events but of memories of historical events, indicating that rather than historians and diviners of history, prophets and prophetic scribes were simply part of their wider culture.<sup>34</sup>

### **Conditionality of prophetic oracles**

The conditionality of the oracle is not usually explicit in ancient Near Eastern prophetic texts, but in FM 7 39, one of the prophetic texts from Mari, Adad of Aleppo explicitly promises King Zimri-Lim territorial gain and probably dynastic succession *if* he ‘fulfils my [=Adad’s] desires’.<sup>35</sup>

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“Geschichtsdivinatorik” [see n. 28], 83). See also his views on other forms of technical divination, see, e.g., Hardmeier, *Geschichtsdivinatorik* (see n. 28), 19-20, 46-47.

<sup>33</sup> Hardmeier “Expertentätigkeit” (see n. 28), 209-212.

<sup>34</sup> Steck, *Gott in der Zeit entdecken* (see n. 31), 12-14. For an introduction see, e.g., the excellent introduction to Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin (eds.), *Remembering and Forgetting in Early Second Temple Judah* (FAT II/85; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012). See more generally Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (7th ed.; München: Beck, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> Most of the prophetic texts from Mari can be found in Jean-Marie Durand, *Archives épistolaires de Mari I* (ARM 26/1; Paris: ERC, 1988); Dominique Charpin, Francis Joannès, Sylvie Lackenbacher and Bertrand Lafont, *Archives épistolaires de Mari II* (ARM

Am I not Adad of Kallassu who in my lap have raised him [=Zimri-Lim]? I returned him to his ancestral throne. After I restored him to his ancestral throne, I again gave him a residence. Now, as I returned him to his ancestral throne, I will take the ‘inheritance’<sup>36</sup> from his house. If he will not give (it to me)—I am the lord of throne, lands and city—what I gave I can take away. If, on the contrary, he fulfils my desires, I will give him throne upon throne, house upon house, lands upon lands, city upon city. And the land from the sunrise to the sunset I will give to him.  
(FM 7 39:14-28)

Similarly, towards the end of the same letter Nūr-Sîn quotes the unnamed *āpilum* (‘spokesperson’) of Adad of Aleppo:

Am I not Adad of Aleppo who raise[d] you on my chest,<sup>37</sup> returned you to your ancestral throne? I deman[d] [n]othing from you (other than) when a wronged man or wo[man] cry to you, stand there! Judge their cas[e]s! This is what I demand from you. Hear what I wrote to you. Respect my words and I will give you the land from the s[unrise] to the sunset; I will [gre]atly add to yo[ur] land.  
(FM 7 39: 49-59)<sup>38</sup>

The underlying logic is that if the king obeys the deity’s command, the deity

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26/2; Paris: ERC, 1988). As with the Neo-Assyrian prophetic material, the Old Babylonian material is also easily accessible in Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy* (see n. 18).

<sup>36</sup> Jean-Marie Durand, *Florilegium marianum VII: Le culte d’Addu d’Alep et l’affaire d’Alahtum* (Mémoires de N.A.B.U. 8; Paris: SEPOA, 2002), 67.

<sup>37</sup> Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy* (see n. 18), 20-21 translates the unclear term *suḫātum* as lap. His observation that it is in parallel with *paḫallum* in line 16 is surely correct. As Nissinen notes, CAD (S, 347) suggests ‘armpit’ and AHw (II, 1054) ‘(weiches) Unterkinn’, neither of which fits the current context well. Above, I follow Manfred Dietrich, “Prophetenbriefe aus Mari,” in *Religiöse Texte: Deutungen der Zukunft in Briefen, Orakeln und Omina* (ed. M. Dietrich et al.; TUAT 2/1; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1986), 83-93, 87. Durand, *Le culte d’Addu d’Alep* (see n. 36), 140 has ‘abdomen’.

<sup>38</sup> For an edition of the entire text, see Durand, *Le culte d’Addu d’Alep* (see n. 36), 137-40; for a translation into English see Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy* (see n. 18), 17-21. It is curious to see the sentence “Hear what I wrote to you” as part of this oracle. It indicates that the action of writing a prophetic oracle could be understood within the culture not necessarily as the action of either the prophet or the scribe, but of the deity sending the oracle.

will support the king—and if not, the deity may, conversely, depose of the king again.

The hermeneutic principle underlying texts such as the vision cycle in Amos and in particular, the fourth vision in Amos 8:1-3, appears to be different, but is in fact related. In the first two instances (Amos 7:1-3 || 4-6), Yhwh shows Amos a vision, explains it as predicting doom for Israel, and is stopped in carrying out his plan by Amos' intercession on behalf of 'Jacob' (=Israel).<sup>39</sup>

<sup>1</sup>This is what my Lord Yhwh showed me: he was creating [a plague of] locusts at the time when the late-sown crops were beginning to sprout—the late-sown crops after the king's reaping. <sup>2</sup>When it had finished devouring the herbage in the land, I said, 'O Lord Yhwh, pray forgive. How will Jacob survive? He is so small.' <sup>3</sup>Yhwh relented concerning this. 'It shall not come to pass', said Yhwh.

<sup>4</sup>This is what the Lord Yhwh showed me: Lo, my Lord Yhwh was summoning to contend by fire which consumed the Great Deep and was consuming the fields. <sup>5</sup>I said, 'Oh, Lord Yhwh, refrain! How will Jacob survive? He is so small.' <sup>6</sup>Yhwh relented concerning this. 'That shall not come to pass, either', said my Lord Yhwh.

The third vision (Amos 7:7-9) takes a turn for the worse—no space is given to Amos' intercession on behalf of Israel:

<sup>7</sup>This is what He showed me: He was standing on a wall checked with a plumb line and He was holding a plumb line. <sup>8</sup>Yhwh asked me, 'What do you see, Amos?' 'A plumb line', I replied. And my Lord declared, 'I am

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<sup>39</sup> Uwe Becker, "Der Prophet als Fürbitter: Zum literarhistorischen Ort der Amos-Visionen," *VT* 51 (2001): 141-165 reads the vision cycle as the result of theological reflection on Amos 4-6.

going to apply a plumb line to My people Israel; I will pardon them no more. <sup>9</sup>The shrines of Isaac shall be laid waste, and the sanctuaries of Israel reduced to ruins; and I will turn upon the House of Jeroboam with the sword.'

The fourth vision (Amos 8:1-3) puts this in explicit terms:

<sup>1</sup>Thus, my lord Yhwh showed me: there was a basket of summer-fruit. <sup>2</sup>He said, 'What do you see, Amos?' 'A basket of summer fruit (קייץ)', I replied. Yhwh said to me, 'The end (קץ) has come for my people Israel. I will not pardon them again. <sup>3</sup>And the singing women of the palace shall howl on that day — declares my Lord Yhwh.

Indeed, in vs. 2 Yhwh tells Amos that 'The end has come for my people Israel,' with the famous word-play between the Hebrew words for 'end' (קץ) and the summer(-fruit) (קייץ), which works rather well in Israelite Hebrew pronunciation, as both words would have been pronounced *qēṣ*.<sup>40</sup> The fifth vision in Amos 9:1-4 shows an enraged Yhwh who will seek out members of his people wherever they may be in order to punish them.<sup>41</sup>

There has been a long discussion what the point of the cycle is and what Amos is saying in the fourth vision. More traditionally, the oracle of doom contained in the cycle have been taken at face value: doom was to come to Israel, as announced by Amos — and it came in the shape of the Neo-Assyrian empire under Shalmaneser V and Sargon II, who conquered the Israelite capital Samaria and effectively ended the independent political history of the ancient state of Israel between 722 and 720 BCE. Two related exegetical questions determine how one reads the vision cycle. The first question asks whether the vision cycle (in parts) goes back to the eighth

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<sup>40</sup> In Judean Hebrew, the noun קייץ was pronounced *qayṣ*, with the diphthong likely still enunciated.

<sup>41</sup> Most scholars consider the fifth vision in the cycle to be a secondary addition. On the literary history of the vision cycle see recently Tchavdar S. Hadjiev, *The Composition and Redaction of the Book of Amos* (BZAW 393; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 60-77.

century prophet Amos, or is the work of a later group of disciples and / or scribes.<sup>42</sup> The second question, in turn, inquires whether or not the announcement of doom is final and irreversible, as it appears to be on the surface.<sup>43</sup>

If the first question is answered by reading the text as a later theological reflection and scribal exegesis of Amos 4-6, as suggested by Becker, it follows that they are essentially providing a theological interpretation of past history—for the (then) present day, by appealing to the prophets' and Yhwh's reliability in the past. If we take this approach seriously, the visions become an appeal not to divert from correct behaviour since otherwise God's wrath will come *as happened in the past*. This theological appeal itself works within the hermeneutic framework of Deuteronomy 13 and 18. By the same token the vision cycle would then no longer be a concrete warning, but a much more general admonition to 'do well'.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Hans-Walter Wolff, *Dodekapropheten: 2. Joel und Amos* (BK.AT XIV/2), Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1985) and Volkmart Fritz, "Amosbuch, Amos-Schule und historischer Amos," in *Prophet und Prophetenbuch: Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. V. Fritz, K.-F. Pohlmann and H.-Chr. Schmitt; BZAW 185; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), 29-43, have classically connected the creation and transmission of the book Amos with such disciples who worked after the fall of Samaria, however assuming that at least the first two visions go back to Amos the prophet. Reinhard G. Kratz, "Die Redaktion der Prophetenbücher," in *Rezeption und Auslegung im Alten Testament und in seinem Umfeld: Ein Symposium aus Anlass des 60. Geburtstags von Odil Hannes Steck* (ed. R. G. Kratz and T. Krüger; OBO 153; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1997), 9-27 argues that the entire cycle must be dated to after the destruction of Samaria. Becker, "Prophet als Fürbitter" (see n. 39), goes further and interprets the visions as a post-exilic theological reflection. On the problematic notion of prophets' disciples as transmitters of their oracles and texts see recently Martti, Nissinen, "Das Problem der Prophetenschüler," in *Houses Full of All Good Things: Essays in Memory of Timo Veijola* (ed. J. Pakkala and M. Nissinen; Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society 95; Helsinki: The Finnish Exegetical Society; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 337-353. Hardmeier offers the private libraries of court officials as an alternative, Hardmeier, "Expertentätigkeit" (see n. 28), 221-222.

<sup>43</sup> Classically answered in the affirmative by Rudolf Smend, "Das Nein des Amos," *EvT* 23 (1963): 404-423.

<sup>44</sup> Indeed, Kratz, "Die Redaktion der Prophetenbücher," argues that the act of writing a prophetic oracle down puts it in this hermeneutic category. It is no longer historically limited for the first time use, but is recorded for future interpretation.



However, if we read the vision cycle either as going back to Amos or another figure prior to the catastrophe, the question arises, what the purpose would be of announcing doom if the announcement was to be final and irreversible. what would the function of such an announcement be?<sup>45</sup> To announce doom to a doomed people appears to suggest a deity who is unnecessarily cruel. If, to the contrary, we understand Amos' oracles to announce Israel's 'end' contingent on whether Israel manages to mend her ways, the vision cycle becomes a—strongly and starkly phrased—warning.<sup>46</sup>

### 3. Rooting Word-‘Play’

In his work on the use of figurative language in the Hebrew Bible and other ancient Near Eastern texts, Scott Noegel has studied the importance of

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<sup>45</sup> Georg Steins, *Gericht und Vergebung: Re-Visionen zum Amosbuch* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2010), 13-15, agrees with Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, “Erwägungen zu Problemen alttestamentlicher Prophetenexegese,” in “*Wer ist wie du, Herr, unter den Göttern?*” *Studien zur Theologie und Religionsgeschichte Israels; für Otto Kaiser zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. I. Kottsieper, J. van Oorschot, K. F. D. Römheld and H. M. Wahl; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 325-341, that such pre-catastrophe announcement of absolute doom is historically unlikely (and would be theologically callous). On these grounds they prefer a post-catastrophe dating of the texts. Steins, *Gericht*, 53 also refers to the similarity of expression in Jer 4:27-28. Peter Riede, *Vom Erbarmen zum Gericht: die Visionen des Amosbuches (Am7-9\*) und ihr literatur- und traditionsgeschichtlicher Zusammenhang* (WMANT 120; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2008), 160-167 regards the fourth vision as a theological reflection post-catastrophe, with the fall of Samaria falling in between the third and the fourth vision. See, however, Jan Christian Gertz, “Die unbedingte Gerichtsankündigung des Amos,” in *Gottes Wege suchend: Beiträge zum Verständnis der Bibel und ihrer Botschaft. Festschrift für Rudolf Mosis zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. F. Sedlmeier; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2003), 153-170, who reconfirms his view regarding the pre-catastrophe dating as well as the announcement of absolute doom. Hadjiev, *Composition and Redaction of the Book of Amos*, 60-77, also dates the first four visions early. Irrespective of whether the visions date from the eighth, seventh, sixth century, or even fifth century BCE the reality which they create in the readers mind must still have been credible to these readers in order to be convincing. Thus, a later dating lessens the force of my arguments above, but it makes them by no means impossible.

<sup>46</sup> This is partly why de Jong, “Scribal Enterprise” (see n. 3), regards the text as a scribal creation. See also Becker, “Prophet als Fürbitter” (see n. 39), 146-149.

word-play and punning for hermeneutics.<sup>47</sup> Like in other ancient Near Eastern texts—and also among many people in modern Western societies—the underlying root of a word, whether ‘real’ or ‘false’ from a modern scholarly point of view—is thought to convey meaning.<sup>48</sup>

A good example for this phenomenon can be found in ARM 26 206. This letter consists entirely of the report of a sign act by an ecstatic (*muhhûm*). Most prophetic Mari letters contain the prophetic oracle along with other information that the sender wished to send along in their report. ARM 26 206 does not only contain the only attested sign-act in the non-Biblical prophetic corpus from the ancient Near East but it combines this sign act with an oracle including word play on the root  $\sqrt{2kl}$ . The ecstatic demands a lamb so that he can eat ( $\sqrt{2kl}$ ) it in front of the assembly of the elders. At the same time he gives the interpretation of his unusual behavior in an oracle:

A ‘devouring’ will occur! Demand that the cities return  
the *asakkum*! You must evict (any) man who commits an  
act of violence<sup>49</sup> from the city!

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<sup>47</sup> Scott B. Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers: The Allusive Language of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* (AOS 89; New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2007); Scott B. Noegel, “Dreaming and the Ideology of Mantics: Homer and Ancient Near Eastern Oneiromancy,” in *Ideologies as Intercultural Phenomena: Proceedings of the Third Annual Symposium of the Assyrian and Babylonian Intellectual Heritage Project: Held in Chicago, USA, October 27-31, 2000* (ed. A. Panaino and G. Pettinato; MELAMMU Symposia 3; Milan: Università di Bologna, 2002), 143-156; Scott B. Noegel, “Yasim-El’s Sophisticated Rhetoric: A Janus Cluster in ARMT XXVI, 419, l.10,” *NABU* 73 (1995): §90; Scott B. Noegel, “‘Word Play’ in Qohelet,” *JHebS* 7 (2007): Article 4. A monograph on “Word Play” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts has been announced by Noegel. See also Edward L. Greenstein, “Wordplay, Hebrew,” *ABD* 6 (1992): 968-971; Gary A. Rendsburg, “Word Play in Biblical Hebrew: An Eclectic Collection,” in *Puns and Pundits: Word Play in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature* (ed. S. B. Noegel; Bethesda: CDL Press, 2000), 137-161; Jack M. Sasson, “Word Play in the Old Testament,” *IDB* Supplementary Volume (1976): 968-170.

<sup>48</sup> This is the etymological fallacy, see, e.g., James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961); James Barr, “Limitations of Etymology as a Lexicographical Instrument in Biblical Hebrew,” *Transactions of the Philological Society* 81 (1983): 41-65. Matters are somewhat different in those instances in which a real or false etymology was / is seen to imbue a word with meaning by the author or interpreter of a text, as we shall see in this section.

<sup>49</sup> Durand, ARM 26/1 (see n. 35), 434-435 translates the expression *awīlum ša rīsam ippušu* as “celui qui s’est livré à une action violente”, referring to a NB attestation *ri-is-sa lū īpuš*

For the (oracle of) well-being of your lord Zi[mri-Lim]  
you shall clothe me with a garment!<sup>50</sup>  
(lines 18-24)

The term translated as ‘devouring’ above, *ukultum*, is derived from the root  $\sqrt{?}kl$  and normally refers either to food (for humans and animals) or to an attack or the outbreak of a disease.<sup>50</sup> The ecstatic’s sign act of eating the—living!—lamb is used as an illustration of the violence and bloodshed that will occur when the divine *ukultum* takes place. The oracle also offers a way out so that neither Zimri-Lim nor any of his citizens become the victim of divine wrath. The way out is by ensuring that the ‘cities’ return the *asakkum* and throw violent criminals out of the city. It is unclear whether the two issues are related. It is attractive to think so, but there is no explicit indication that this is the case. The second divine demand to expel violent criminals could simply be in line with general demands to uphold justice rather than being connected to return the *asakkum*.

I would like to suggest, however, that the punishment and thus also the prophetic sign act are connected, not only in their association with the root  $\sqrt{?}kl$ , but also through the fact that the term *asakkum* is well attested with forms of *akālum*. Two different meanings are proposed for this expression. The dictionaries differentiate between the word *asakku* I (‘demon’), and *asakku* II (‘taboo’). ‘Eating’ the ‘taboo’ is then thought to refer to the eating of something dedicated to the deity (or king).<sup>51</sup> Dominique Charpin has persuasively argued that it is likely that the two

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in JNES 15, p.136, 82. The verb *râsu* appears in OB as well as in NB and the noun is only attested once in NB and here. Although there is some uncertainty as to the meaning Durand’s interpretation is convincing. Wolfgang Heimpel, *Letters to the King of Mari: A New Translation, With Historical Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* (MC 12; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 256 leaves the word untranslated.

<sup>50</sup> CAD 20: 62-65. The root  $\sqrt{?}kl$  is used three times in this oracle, in lines 9 and 10 in its verbal meaning ‘to eat’, and in line 18 in the noun *ukultum*. See, e.g. Abraham Malamat, “The Secret Council and Prophetic Involvement in Mari and Israel,” in *Mari and the Bible* (ed. A. Malamat; SHCANE 12; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 136-137; Michael C. Astour, “Sparagmos, Omophagia, and Ecstatic Prophecy at Mari,” *UF* 24 (1992): 1-2.

<sup>51</sup> E.g., AHW I: 73 under *asakku(m)* II.

words *asakku* should, in fact, not be separated. Citing texts where the word *asakku* is replaced by SAR.MEŠ (*nīšum*, ‘herbs’), he argues that it is the eating of the herbs of the deity which empowers the demon to enact punishment onto the person who has done so.<sup>52</sup> Either way, the expression acquired a metaphorical meaning of transgressing a deity’s or a king’s command. Irrespective of what the oracle is demanding precisely, the association of the term *asakkum* with *akālum* likely gave rise to the eating of the lamb as a sign act for the announcement of the attack / outbreak of a disease.<sup>53</sup>

SAA 9 7, the text mentioning Elam and Cimmeria referred to above as an example how prophetic texts can refer to the past as a means of justification, also contains a case of assonance / root punning. Here, however, the case is not one of the use of a root underlying both crime and threatened punishment like in ARM 26 206. Instead, it employs assonance as motivation for the way the oracle is formulated. Neo-Assyrian Cimmeria is *Gimir*, which could be understood as being related to the root  $\sqrt{gmr}$  as a folk-etymology.<sup>54</sup> To the Neo-Assyrian mind the verbal root would likely come to mind upon hearing the name of the country.

The name of the country itself, *Gimir* could be understood as a construct form of *gimru* as in the expression *gimir libbīya* (my entire heart).

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<sup>52</sup> Dominique Charpin, Dominique. “‘Manger un serment’,” in *Jurer et maudire: pratiques politiques et usages juridiques du serment dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (ed. S. Lafont. Méditerranées: revue de l’association Méditerranées 10-11; Paris: l’Harmattan, 1996), 85-96.

<sup>53</sup> Speculatively one might say that the oracle is announcing that the *taboo* item (*asakku*) should be returned to the deity—with Durand, ARM 26/I (see n. 35), 434-435 likely a form of Dagan—and that the ‘man who committing an act of “violence”’ may be the person who is acting against the deity. If this is the case, it may even be possible to use the concept of *ius talionis* to explain the threatened punishment: for the ‘eating’ perpetrated against the deity, the deity will ‘devour’ the population.

<sup>54</sup> Another folk-etymology used to derive meaning can be found in 1 Sam 9:9 where the term נָבִיא is playfully understood as being derived from the root בָּיָא, see John Briggs Curtis, “A Folk Etymology of NĀBĪ’,” *VT* 29 (1979): 491-493.

Syntactically such a construction would be awkward as no noun is expected to be in the construct state in this position.<sup>55</sup> However, it is not necessary for the pun between *Gimir/gimru* and *agammar* to work for the sentence to be grammatical—the issue is not constructing a grammatical sentence but imbuing the name of the country with meaning.

The third example of using punning productively in prophetic literature is again Amos' fourth vision, where the basket of summer fruit (כלוב קיץ) is a sign for the impending doom (קץ). In Judean Hebrew, and therefore also in Masoretic pointing the two words, קיץ<sup>56</sup> and קץ are pronounced differently. In Israelite Hebrew, however, as pointed out above, the diphthong /ay/ had monophthongised to long /ē/, so that both words would therefore have been pronounced *qēš*. Thus the basket of summer fruit which one might otherwise have thought to be a symbol of life and riches, becomes a symbol for the end.

Similarly, when Yhwh asks Jeremiah what he sees in Jer 1:11-12, Jeremiah answers that he sees an almond branch (מקל שקדים). Yhwh's answer, 'I am vigilant over my word to do it', is based on the consonants of the word for almond, שקד, which are understood to form the relatively rare verbal root with the meaning 'to keep watch, be vigilant over'. To the unsuspecting western reader of a translation of Jeremiah, there is no connection between the almond branch and Yhwh's warning that he is about to enact his punishment.<sup>57</sup> But to the ancient reader and listener the 'play' with the sound of the three consonants שקד would have established a significant connection between the two terms, thus rendering the almond

<sup>55</sup> Unless one were to allow to understand *agammar* as a relative clause in its own right: 'Like Elam is the entire country, which I will finish off'; see GAG §166.

<sup>56</sup> As קיץ is the last word in Amos 8:1 it is there vocalised with pausal lengthening of the *pataḥ* to *qamaš*.

<sup>57</sup> Like in the case of Amos' fourth vision, I read this as a final warning, this time not for Israel but for Judah.

branch a good symbol for the threatening deity.

Both prophetic books use word-play in a similar way in a similar literary construction. Jeremiah and Amos are each depicted as having a vision and Yhwh asks them what they are seeing. Each prophet answers with a description which focuses on the crucial item. In a third step Yhwh explains the significance of the item. We will return to this structure and the underlying hermeneutics in section five below. But before we will examine the use of symbols and sign-acts from a hermeneutic point of view.

#### **4. The Use of Images and Sign Acts**

Prophetic texts are full of evocative imagery, some of which is obscure, some of which is fairly obvious and some of which is made obvious in the context of the prophetic text itself. We have already discussed at length ARM 26 206, so there is no need to repeat the discussion here. But it is clear that the ecstatic's actions are of the same kind as those of the biblical prophets.

Instead, I would like to offer an example from the 'Prostration Hemerology'.<sup>58</sup> Like other such texts, the Prostration Hemerology contains entries for certain days for the months of the year, and advises what a person should do to avert evil and achieve positive results. The actions described are not strictly speaking sign-acts as they are not performed to express a divine message to an audience. But the reader is advised to perform meaningful acts which will have a beneficiary outcome in the future. Line 31 of this text contains the advice to get a hot bread from a cook in order to avert the potentially negative outcomes of an oath or a curse:

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<sup>58</sup> See Alasdair Livingstone, *Hemerologies of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* (CUSAS 25; Bethesda: CDL Press, 2013), 161-175. The text will be re-edited by Enrique Jiménez and Selim F. Adalı, "The 'Prostration Hemerology' Revisited: An Everyman's Manual at the King's Court," *ZA* (forthcoming). I would like to thank Eckart Frahm for pointing my attention to this text.

In the month of Ṭebētu on the 3rd day he should receive hot bread (*emmetu*) from a cook. Then the oath (*māmītu*) and the curse will not follow him.

The pun here is in the connection of the words for hot bread (*emmetu*) and oath (*māmītu*). The significance of this is that it shows that the use of word-play to derive meaning and to connect crime and (potential) punishment is not restricted to prophetic announcements and sign acts but that it is productive also in other forms of divination.<sup>59</sup>

The sign-acts of prophets such as Ezekiel and Jeremiah are well known and have been extensively studied.<sup>60</sup> I will present two cases, Jer 13:1-11 and Ezek 6:11-14, to exemplify two different kinds of sign-acts. As Ezekiel's clapping of hands is not always understood as a sign-act I shall start with it. I agree with Friebe in understanding actions that are significant within the context of an oracle as sign-acts.<sup>61</sup>

Ezekiel 6:11-12 contains the divine command to Ezekiel to clap his hands, to stamp his feet, to call out in dismay on account of the transgressions of the 'house of Israel', and to announce doom to them. Unlike the vision reports which we have looked at previously, there is no explicit command to explain the sign-act.<sup>62</sup> The absence of an internal explanation leaves more space for interpreters, and predictably readers

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<sup>59</sup> Indeed, Jiménez and Adalı, "Prostration Hemerology", suggest that a similar mechanism is at play in line 16, where the verb 'to release' is used in the protasis and the apodosis. One could argue whether this is, strictly speaking, a pun, or simply the repetition of the same word with slightly different uses within its semantic spectrum.

<sup>60</sup> On Jeremiah and Ezekiel see the extended study by Kelvin G. Friebe, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts: Rhetorical Nonverbal Communication* (JSOTSup 283; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

<sup>61</sup> Friebe, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts* (see n. 61), 13-20 understands 'all the nonverbal behaviors (i.e. bodily movements, gestures and paralanguage) whose primary purpose was communicative and interactive' as sign acts.

<sup>62</sup> Instead, Yhwh is addressing himself directly to Ezekiel in vv 13-14, possibly a secondary extension to the previous two verses.

through the ages have grasped that opportunity. What is the significance of the clapping and stamping in the context of this oracle? According to Friebel, two main lines of interpretation have been taken in the scholarly community: either the signs are said to express divine *Schadenfreude* or displeasure and disappointment.<sup>63</sup>

To me the latter interpretation appears to be easier, but in the absence of a clearly marked internal interpretation either here or in a similar context elsewhere, it may be better to express preference rather than final certainty. For our purposes here it is important to note that rather than the sign-act being an expression which is then interpreted in a conversation between deity and prophet, here the prophetic oracle and accompanying gestures form one organic whole, rather than two independent halves.

The second example is Jer 13:1-11.<sup>64</sup> This text is a classical sign-act, in that it contains a divine command to Jeremiah to carry out various actions over some period of time. Yhwh starts by commanding Jeremiah to buy and wear a new loin-cloth but not to wash it. The next command is to take the loin-cloth to the Euphrates (פרתה) and to hide it there. In a third step, after a long time (רבים ימים מקץ) Jeremiah is told to return to the Euphrates and to find and uncover the loin cloth there, finding it quite in tatters. Only after this third step in this extended sign-act follows an oracle which explains the

<sup>63</sup> Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts* (see n. 61), 254-260.

<sup>64</sup> Hermann-Josef Stipp, “‘But into the Water You Must Not Dip It’ (Jeremiah 13:1): Methodological Reflections on How to Identify the Work of the Deuteronomistic Redaction in the Book of Jeremiah,” in *Thinking of Water in the Early Second Temple Period* (ed. E. Ben Zvi and C. Levin; BZAW 461; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 167-195, the Jer 13:1-11 argues for the literary unity of Jer 13:1-11 a pericope which he regards as replete with deuteronomistic prose and probably post-exilic in date. Whether or not this necessarily, as Stipp argues (180-181), dictates that the introductory formulae *only* have a *Sitz in der Literatur* and therefore no more connection to the experience of readers in ancient Judah is less obvious to me. Even if the scene is a literary creation, a view towards which I am sympathetic, it still requires the reader to be familiar with a real life situation in which the described scene is imaginable, and with it the hermeneutic set up.



significance of the elements in the sign-act: the loin-cloth is the ‘whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah’, which Yhwh, personified by Jeremiah, had taken very close to himself indeed, but which are going to end up in tatters in the vicinity of the Euphrates after spending some time there, hidden away.

None of the interpretation involved in the oracle is particularly surprising, after we hear that the prophet is to go to this location called פרת.<sup>65</sup> There is a considerable amount of discussion in the scholarly literature whether this refer to the Euphrates, the normal meaning of this word, or whether another, much smaller river in the vicinity of Anathoth is intended here, the *Ēn Fārā*, which in Hebrew would have been spelled as פרה, with the ת in פרתה being inserted in vv. 4, 6 and 7 between the locative ending and the feminine ending of the noun. בפרת in v 5 would then have been formed to correspond with that.

The question which lies behind this debate regards the nature of this pericope. Is it meant to contain the historical performance of the prophet Jeremiah, walking the enormous distance between Anathoth and the Euphrates twice? Does it contain a dream or vision, in which case the physical distance between Anathoth and the Euphrates are immaterial?<sup>66</sup> Or is this a purely literary text, which opens the possibility of a space between the real and the visionary.<sup>67</sup>

For the present purpose a final decision does not seem necessary.<sup>68</sup> Whether the river where Jeremiah buries his undergarment is physically in Judah or Mesopotamia, or in some visionary world, it is clear that the sign-

<sup>65</sup> The final ה in the form in the text is locative.

<sup>66</sup> Stipp, “‘But into the Water’” (see n. 65), 187-188 states that the text does not give any indication of being a vision, and therefore must refer to *Ēn Fāra*.

<sup>67</sup> For further discussion see, e.g., William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah I-XXV* (2 vols; ICC Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 285-292 and Stipp, “‘But into the Water’” (see n. 65).

<sup>68</sup> It is unlikely that Jeremiah travelled the enormous distances involved, and it is even more unlikely that any audience would have accompanied him to witness the action.

act itself or the telling or reading of it was meant to make an audience curious—as we have seen already in the case of ARM 26 206. This curious deed is then followed up by an oracle which takes a key-word principle, which in this case is less obscure than in ARM 26 206. When the פרת is understood as the Euphrates, and Jeremiah as the stand-in for Yhwh, it is in line with other prophetic threats against Judah to understand the garment as symbolising Judah, once close to Yhwh like nothing and no-one else but soon to be ‘buried’ in obscurity near the Euphrates left to rot there and then ‘good for nothing’ (לא יצלה לכל).

These three sign-acts illustrate some of the hermeneutic strategies used by ancient Near Eastern prophets. Whereas the ecstatic in ARM 26 206 uses a key-word motive centred around the root  $\sqrt{kl}$ , the biblical Jeremiah uses the real world (himself, the loin-cloth, the river) as metaphors for the announced doom. Ezekiel’s sign act in ch. 6 finally accompanies the words of the prophet immediately. Here, the oracle is not an elaboration of the prophet’s actions, as is the case in Jer 13:1-11 and, in my view, in ARM 26 206.

## 5. Pesharim and Interpreting Angels

Before we can conclude some short comments on Pesher and the development of the genre of vision report seem in order.<sup>69</sup> Pesharim to several prophetic books are attested at Qumran:<sup>70</sup> fragments of Pesharim on Zephania, Isaiah, Hosea and famously Habakkuk are preserved. These texts

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<sup>69</sup> The literature on the Pesharim is vast and no attempt is made here to fully interact with it. However, as they represent a way of reading ‘prophetically’ prophetic and non-prophetic texts some basic comments appear necessary.

<sup>70</sup> Also some non-prophetic books, e.g., Psalms, are covered by a Pesher at Qumran: 4QpPs<sup>a-b</sup>. Indeed, there is a debate into which I do not want to enter here, as to whether the Pesharim should be considered their own genre. The continuous Pesharim on prophetic books do form a distinct group when looking at the transmission and study of prophetic books, which is why I treat them separately here.

contain quotations from the biblical book which is then interpreted bit by bit, in a way that is not altogether different from the way that some ancient Near Eastern omen texts operate.<sup>71</sup> This interpretative process is likely to have been understood not only as a scholarly enterprise by the community that composed them, but also as in some form divinely inspired. Indeed, several attempts have been made in the recent past to regard the Pesharim as one of the heirs of the biblical prophetic tradition. Thus, Alex Jassen has shown that scriptural interpretation at Qumran was understood to be a prophetic activity.<sup>72</sup>

The hermeneutics used to interpret the words and phrases in the Pesharim vary considerably between the literal and the more creative.<sup>73</sup> Many scholars have likened this process to that of ancient Near Eastern omen interpretation, and there clearly are some similarities. However, the Qumran scribes did not have access to written interpretative handbooks, and in this sense the Pesher is more akin to ancient Near Eastern commentary literature.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> See, e.g., L. H. Silberman, "Unriddling the Riddle: A Study in the Scripture and Language of the Habakkuk Pesher (1QpHab)," *RevQ* 3 (1961): 323-335; Martti Nissinen, "Pesharim as Divination: Qumran Exegesis, Omen Interpretation and Literary Prophecy," in *Prophecy after the Prophets? The Contribution of the Dead Sea Scrolls to the Understanding of Biblical and Extra-Biblical Prophecy* (ed. K. De Troyer, A. Lange and L. L. Schulte; CBET 52; Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 43-60; Michael Fishbane, "The Qumran Pesher and Traits of Ancient Hermeneutics," in *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies: Held at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem 13-19 August 1973 under the Auspices of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities; Vol. 1* (ed. Avigdor Shinan; 4 vols; Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1975), 97-114.

<sup>72</sup> See Alex P. Jassen, "Prophecy after the 'Prophets': The Dead Sea Scrolls and the History of Prophecy in Judaism," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Context: Integrating the Dead Sea Scrolls in the Study of Ancient Texts, Languages, and Cultures* (ed. A. Lange et al.; 2 vols; VTSup 140; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 577-593; Jassen, *Mediating the Divine* (see n. 7); Jassen, "Prophets and Prophecy" (see n. 7); Jassen, "The Pesharim" (see n. 8). See also Nissinen, "Pesharim as Divination" (see n. 72), 55-60.

<sup>73</sup> See on the question, e.g., Fishbane, "The Qumran Pesher" (see n. 52), 98-100; Shani L. Berrin, "Qumran Pesharim," in *Biblical Interpretation at Qumran* (ed. M. Henze; Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 110-113.

<sup>74</sup> Gabbay, "Akkadian Commentaries" (see n. 8); on ancient Near Eastern commentaries in general see the introduction by Eckart Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries: Origins of Interpretation* (GMTR 5; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2011). The

This indicates that the hermeneutic traditions used for various genres of texts were related to each other and that the underlying hermeneutic principles could be used across a number of different genres of texts, be they the interpretation of divine names, or the interpretation of Scriptural literature.

As Konrad Schmid has recently pointed out, Peshar Habakkuk works on the assumption that not only did Habakkuk's prophetic book carry meaning for their own times, but also that Habakkuk was not aware of that.<sup>75</sup> From the Peshar's point of view this rationalist thought solves the problem what a biblical prophet may or may not have been aware of when he composed his text.<sup>76</sup> Further, as Kratz has pointed out, this does not preclude the possibility that the text may have had prior relevance.<sup>77</sup> However, the millennial views of the Qumran community preclude the possibility of later relevance as the end times had already come.

The prophetic vision belongs to the basic forms of prophetic literature throughout the world. It is the ability to perceive, both aurally as well as visually, a reality that is beyond that experienced by most human beings.<sup>78</sup>

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absence of written handbooks is no reason to assume that there may not have been oral traditions which would have helped the interpreter of a biblical text in their enterprise.

<sup>75</sup> Schmid, "Prognosen" (see n. 5), 473-475.

<sup>76</sup> It is historically, of course, unlikely that much of the biblical prophetic literature was composed by the eponymous prophets themselves, but the authors of Peshar Habakkuk would hardly have been aware of that.

<sup>77</sup> Kratz, "Das Neue" (see n. 3), 19-22. Schmid, "Prognosen" (see n. 5), 470 argues that the "Passungenaugigkeit" is intentional as authors did not want to limit their applicability. On the issue, see also Steck, *Gott in der Zeit* (see n. 31), especially 187-204. A perspective that, as far as I am aware of, is not embraced in the corpus is to argue that an oracle's subsequent applicability is guaranteed by its earlier fulfilment. While this may have required some hermeneutic acrobatics, it would be the logical consequence of reliance on previous prophetic oracles coming true as well as the multiple applicability of the same oracle.

<sup>78</sup> For our purposes it is immaterial whether that 'reality' is a 'real' reality, and potentially perceivable by other individuals as well, whether it is still 'real', but open only to the prophetic individual, or whether it is purely imagined. Indeed, for the underlying hermeneutic principles agreed on by the prophet's society, it does not even matter if the prophet only pretends to perceive this reality.

In the Hebrew Bible Isaiah's throne room vision or Ezekiel's vision of the rising corpses are among the best known examples. Like all supernatural perceptions visions work nicely in literary contexts where the reader can share in the experience of the vision through reading the description in a way that an oral performance is unlikely to be able to achieve.

But the hermeneutic challenges of visions go further than that. Underlying the problem of how to communicate the seen and heard to the addressees of the vision is the question what the vision is supposed to mean. In many vision reports in the Hebrew Bible, God is seen asking the prophet what it is that they see, and then gives the interpretation to the prophet.<sup>79</sup> We have already seen this dynamic at work in the example of Amos' vision cycle. In these cases God himself is seen as 'solving' the question as to the significance of the object that Amos sees. Isaiah's throne room vision, while different at first glance, also uses the same underlying principle: Isaiah sees Yhwh on his throne and he recognises Yhwh's majesty. Then the two converse and it is in that conversation that Yhwh commands Isaiah to go out and become a prophet on his behalf. Thus, the significance of the throne room scene is not just to show the reader Yhwh's majesty on his throne, but to appoint Isaiah to his mission and prepare him for it.

In both these, and many other visions, God himself speaks to the prophet. At some time in the Second Temple period, however, vision reports change, and another character enters whose task it is to explain the meaning of what is seen. This interpreting figure, identified as a heavenly being of some sort and usually understood as an angel by modern readers, changes the dynamics for visions as God only shows the images, he does not interpret them any longer.<sup>80</sup> The interpreting angels in Daniel and Zechariah

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<sup>79</sup> On the form-critical analysis of vision reports see, e.g., Achim Behrens, *Prophetische Visionsschilderungen im Alten Testament: Sprachliche Eigenarten, Funktion und Geschichte einer Gattung* (AOAT 292; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002), 377-386.

<sup>80</sup> The situation that God sends a divine message to someone and then interprets it himself

thus perform an intermediary function between the divine sphere and the human. This function is effectively identical to that of a human diviner, namely to translate divine language—the vision—into language that human beings can understand, with the obvious difference that unlike the human diviner the interpreting figure is not human. The role of the prophet, previously capable of interacting directly with Yhwh, is thus redefined—he now deals with an intermediary on the divine side. The above cited definition of prophecy that is widely used in ancient Near Eastern and Biblical Studies assumes that the prophet is the direct intermediary between deity and human addressee; but with the emergence of the interpreting angel, the deity no longer speaks to the intended addressee only through a human intermediary but through a divine intermediary first.<sup>81</sup>

## 6. Conclusions

As we have seen, ancient Near Eastern, and with it also ancient Israelite prophecy as well as biblical prophetic literature takes part in a hermeneutically sophisticated discourse. Indeed, biblical prophetic literature creates its own self-recurrent form of prophetic writing. If the available texts do not completely distort the general gist (rather than the details) of historical reality, then prophets were capable of interacting on some level with a wider intellectual tradition, although van der Toorn is most likely correct in arguing that even the most faithful of scribes described the actions and words of prophets in their voice and thereby changed them.<sup>82</sup>

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potentially undermines the position of a technical diviner, as their skill to decipher divine messages whether in the flight of birds, in livers, or in the dreams of other human beings. A passage in the Kirta epic extends this construction to the extreme, where El sends himself a dream, KTU 1.16 iii 1-13.

<sup>81</sup> This fits into the wider trend in Second Temple times to deanthropomorphise god and to ensure that Yhwh is sufficiently removed from the human sphere not to be influenced by it. The divine intermediary helps achieve and maintain this distance.

<sup>82</sup> Karel van der Toorn, “Old Babylonian Prophecy between the Oral and the Written,”

The principal point of ancient Near Eastern prophecy—to inform a decision maker of the potential outcomes of their decision—can be observed in the majority of texts, including Deuteronomy 18. The difference between most ancient Near Eastern prophetic texts and many biblical texts on the one hand, and Deuteronomy 18 on the other is that the latter needs a prophetic announcement to come true for it to be prophetic irrespective of the decisions taken before it happens. The other group of texts is less concerned with the events predicted in the prophetic oracle actually occurring; the goal is rather that the right decision is being taken, even if that means that the events described in the prophetic oracle do not become reality.<sup>83</sup>

The past is appealed to in this context in order to show that the deity—and the prophet—provide reliable information.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, SAA 9 1.4 ii 37' is quite explicit about this: 'the future will be like the past', promises Nabû.<sup>85</sup> In the Hebrew Bible Yhwh is not quite so explicit, but the deuteronomistic idiom 'my/his servants, the prophets' (to whom previous issues had been revealed) fulfills a similar function in 1-2 Kings and Jeremiah.<sup>86</sup> Past oracles are also appealed to within biblical prophetic literature through *Fortschreibung*.

Most of the hermeneutic principles used in prophetic texts—in particular in vision reports where these principles are explicit—are of the kind that are used in other texts as well. Meaning is gained from religious

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*JNSL* 24 (1998): 55-70. As the linguistic turn has taught us, once past, an event can only ever be approximated. That does not mean that scholars of ancient texts should not try to do this, but it should remind us that we need to be careful about the extent of our claims. See, for example, the helpful discussion in Lester L. Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period; Volume 1: Yehud: A History of the Persian Province of Judah* (LSTS 47; London: T & T Clark, 2004), 3-16.

<sup>83</sup> Tiemeyer, "Cancelling Prophecy" (see n. 3).

<sup>84</sup> Bring in von Rad, Kratz, "Das Neue" (see n. 3); Schmid, "Prognosen" (see n. 5).

<sup>85</sup> *urkiūte lū kī pāniūte*.

<sup>86</sup> See Thomas Römer, "Moses, Israel's First Prophet, and the Formation of the Deuteronomistic and Prophetic Libraries," in *Israelite Prophecy and the Deuteronomistic History: Portrait, Reality, and the Formation of a History* (ed. M. R. Jacobs and R. F. Person Jr; AIL 14; Atlanta: SBL, 2013), 134-135.

imagery, from assonance and etymological interpretation of the roots of the used words. Compared with the hermeneutics of Mesopotamian commentaries the hermeneutical procedures found in prophetic texts in cuneiform and alphabetic texts are, however, relatively simple. Since we can see these procedures at work already in the prophetic texts from Mari it is likely that they were one of the characteristics of prophetic speech and writing in the wider ancient Near East.

This indicates that prophetic speech partook in the wider intellectual climate and—unsurprisingly—is a product of its intellectual environment. Moshe Anbar and Charles Halton have pointed out that Mesopotamian prophetic texts appear to allude to literary texts.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, if C.L. Crouch's and Casey Strine's readings of the book of Ezekiel are correct, then allusions to *Gilgamesh* can be found in it.<sup>88</sup>

Returning to our initial question we can, therefore, say that prophets—whether scribal or oral performers—seem to have partaken in the general intellectual life around them. The hermeneutics used within the texts are not of a very complicated nature. The hermeneutical efforts underlying the concept of prophecy itself, namely informing a decision maker of the potential outcome of their decisions, are akin to those of modern advisors and experts who produce projections of decisions, whether in the military, the economy or the environment. Like modern day advisors many worked

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<sup>87</sup> Charles Halton, "Allusions to the Stream of Tradition in Neo-Assyrian Oracles," *ANES* 56 (2009): 50-61; Moshe Anbar, "Un *apilum* cite le mythe de Atram-hasis?," *NABU* 1993: §67

<sup>88</sup> C. L. Crouch and Casey A. Strine, "YHWH's Battle against Chaos in Ezekiel: The Transformation of Judahite Mythology for a New Situation," *JBL* 132 (2013): 883-903; C. L. Crouch, "Ezekiel's Oracles against the Nations in Light of a Royal Ideology of Warfare," *JBL* 130 (2011): 473-492; Casey A. Strine, "Chaoskampf against Empire: YHWH's Battle against Gog (Ezek 38-39) as Resistance Literature," in *Divination, Politics and Ancient Near Eastern Empires* (ed. A. Lenzi and J. Stökl; ANEM 7; Atlanta: SBL, 2014), 87-108. Their analysis has recently been challenged by Jonathan Stökl, "'A Youth without Blemish, Handsome, Proficient in All Wisdom, Knowledgeable and Intelligent': Ezekiel's Access to Babylonian Culture", in *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context* (ed. C. Waerzeggers and J. Stökl; BZAW 478, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 223-252. Stökl also allows for interaction with the wider ancient Near Eastern stream of tradition.



for the government, and thus the term *Herrschaftswissen* appears to be appropriate to characterise their endeavors.<sup>89</sup> And like modern day projections, the predictions of ancient prophets (and other diviners) were nominally about the future, but their real aim was the present.

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<sup>89</sup> Beate Pongratz-Leisten, *Herrschaftswissen in Mesopotamien: Formen der Kommunikation zwischen Gott und König im 2. und 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr* (SAAS 10; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1999).